

Performance Funding Metrics

Retention and Graduation Rates

OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

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STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM *of* FLORIDA
Board of Governors



The national standard graduation rate was created by the Student Right to Know Act of 1990, which required institutions of higher education receiving federal financial assistance to report graduation rates to current and prospective students via the US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). This act established the graduation rate based on 150% of the normal time for completion from the program - which is six years for a four-year program.

In 2011, the Board of Governors included retention and graduation rate metrics in its 2012-2025 System Strategic Plan. In 2014, the importance of the retention and graduation rate data was further elevated by their inclusion in a new Performance-Based Funding Model. This document provides details on the methodology and procedures used by Board of Governors staff during the analysis of the retention and graduation rate data as reported in the annual Accountability Report and used in the Performance Based Funding model.



1. Data Sources

The State University System of Florida Board of Governors maintains a student unit record database titled the State University Database System (SUDS). This database contains over 400 data elements about students, faculty and programs at SUS institutions. Retention and graduation rate data are finalized using the Retention file. The Board of Governors' Information Resource Management (IRM) unit builds the Retention file annually using the Student Instruction File (SIF) and the Degrees Awarded (SIFD) files. Once Retention has been built, each university reviews the Retention file and works with IRM staff to make edits before university Data Administrators approve and submit the data to IRM.

2. Defining the Cohort

A cohort is a group of people used in a study who have something in common. In this case, a cohort is composed of students who were all admitted to the university during the same year. The number of students who are assigned to a cohort serves as the denominator in the calculation of retention and graduation rates. University Data Administrators classify students based on the following components which Board staff use to determine student cohorts:

a. **Student Level:**

Only the students who meet the following criteria are included in the cohort.

- STUDENT CLASS LEVEL [#1060] is either L (lower division undergraduate) or U (upper division undergraduate).
- DEGREE HIGHEST HELD [#1112] must be less than a Bachelor's.
- FEE CLASSIFICATION KIND [#1107] must equal 'G' (general instruction).

b. **Cohort Year:**

A year is measured differently in retention and graduation data than the standard academic year (of summer, fall, spring). A retention cohort year is defined as the fall, spring, and summer terms. Students selected for inclusion within each Cohort Year are based on the following rule:

- DATE MOST RECENT ADMISSION [#1420] equals REPORTING TIME FRAME [#2001].

c. **Cohort Types:**

The COHORT TYPE [#1429] is a derived element that is built by IRM and is based on the TYPE OF STUDENT AT TIME OF MOST RECENT ADMISSION [#1413] as assigned by the university.

- First-Time in College Students include two types of students:
 - Students who are admitted into a university for the first time and who have earned less than 12 credit hours after high school graduation [#1413= 'B'].
 - Students who are considered 'Early Admits' because they have been admitted to the university prior to their high school graduation [#1413= 'E'].
- AA Transfer Students who have transferred from the Florida College System with an Associate in Arts Degree. This value is based on the three following elements:
 - TYPE OF STUDENT AT DATE OF ENTRY [#1068] or TYPE OF STUDENT AT TIME OF MOST RECENT ADMISSION [#1413] equals 'J'.
 - DEGREE HIGHEST HELD [#1112] equals 'A' (Associates).
 - LAST INSTITUTIONAL CODE [#1067] or INSTITUTION GRANTING HIGHEST DEGREE [#1411] must equal a Florida Public Community College.
- Other Transfer Students include all other undergraduate transfer students.



d. Student Right to Know Flag:

The STUDENT RIGHT TO KNOW (SRK) FLAG [#1437] is an entry status indicator that is a 'Yes/No' flag based on the term (Summer, Fall, or Spring) that a student is first admitted.

- YES: If a student enters the institution in the fall term the SRK flag will be set to 'Yes'. If a student enters the institution in the summer term and progresses to fall term, the SRK flag will be set to 'Yes'.
- NO: If a student enters in the summer term and does not progress to the fall term; or, if a student enters in the spring term the SRK flag will be set to 'No'.

e. Full-Time / Part-Time Indicator:

The FULL-TIME / PART-TIME INDICATOR [#1433] is an indicator based on the number of credit hours attempted (not earned) during their first fall term. A student entering in the fall and taking 12 or more credit hours will remain in the full-time category regardless of the number of credits taken in subsequent terms.

- This indicator is based on the CURRENT TERM COURSE LOAD [#1063] which is the number of hours enrolled/attempted during a term. This excludes courses that are audited, all credits awarded during the term through 'Credit by Examination'. Students completing prior term incompletes are not included unless they have registered and paid fees for the credits they are completing.
- This indicator is used in reporting retention and graduation data to the federal government - to IPEDS.

f. Cohort Revisions and Adjustments:

The US Congress and the US Dept. of Education allow institutions to make revisions and adjustments to their student cohorts. There is a difference between revising and adjusting a cohort. Revising a cohort means modifying the cohort data to reflect better information that has become available since the cohort was first reported (e.g., you may now have more complete racial/ethnic information on the cohort). Adjusting a cohort means subtracting any allowable exclusions from the revised cohort to establish a denominator for graduation rate calculation. These cohort adjustments are typically the cause of the differences between the preliminary and final retention and graduation rates.

- Cohort Adjustment Flag [#1442] is a data element on the Retention Cohort Changes (RETC) table that is used to indicate that a retention file record has been modified based on a change in status of the student at the institution.
 - University Data Administrators identify the students who have died, suffered a permanent disability, left to serve in the Armed Services, left to serve in with Foreign Aid Service of the federal government (such as the Peace Corps), or left to serve on an Official Church Mission. These students are removed from the cohort and are not included in the retention and graduation rates.
 - University Data Administrators also can identify students who enter an Advanced Graduate program without earning a bachelor's degree. Since these students do not earn a bachelor's degree, they can be removed from the standard FTIC cohort – this is typically done retrospectively for the calculation of the six-year graduation rate.



3. Calculating the Number Retained or Graduated

a. Timing Issues

The SUDS data submission cycle for retention and graduation rate data plays a role in how the data are reported and used for policymaking. Enrollment data is reported on a term basis and has two submissions each term:

- Preliminary fall enrollment data provides a snapshot at the beginning of the term and is submitted annually in mid-October on the Preliminary Student Instruction File (SIFP).
- Final fall enrollment data provides comprehensive data after the end of the term and is submitted annually in mid-January in the Student Instruction File (SIF).
- Degree data is reported only once after each term in the Student Instruction File for Degrees (SIFD). However, this data often includes 'late degrees' which are degrees that were awarded in a previous term, but are only just now being reported to SUDS. Because graduation rates are based on a fall-spring-summer year, the final graduation rates cannot be determined until the 'late' summer degrees are reported in the following summer SIFD submission. Summer degree data is submitted annually in early-October.

b. Second Year Retention Rates

- Cohorts: The number of students in the cohort serves as the denominator for the retention rate, and is based on the following rules: Cohort Type= 'FTIC'; Student Right to Know (SRK)= 'Yes'; FT/PT Indicator= 'Full-time'.
 - The methodology used for the Retention Rate in the annual Accountability Report is different from what is reported to the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The primary difference is due to timing – the retention rate that is reported to IPEDS is based on preliminary enrollment data; whereas the retention rate in the annual Accountability Report is based on final enrollment data.
- Retained: The number of students in the cohort who are enrolled during the second fall term serves as the numerator for the retention rate.
- As part of the Performance Based Funding model, the Board of Governors decided to add a Grade Point Average (GPA) component to the standard retention rate metric to gain a sense of how well students who are retained are doing in their courses. This new metric is called the Academic Progress Rate. Board staff decided to use a cumulative GPA (at the end of the first year - before the second fall term) of at least 2.0 as a threshold because it is a commonly referenced measure of satisfactory academic progress. In fact, FTICs who returned for their 2nd fall with a GPA above 2.0 are *8 times more likely* to graduate within six years than students who begin their second Fall with a GPA of less than 2.0.



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c. Six Year Graduation Rates

- Cohorts: The number of students in the cohort serves as the denominator for the graduation rate, and is based on: Cohort Type= 'FTIC'; SRK= 'Yes'; FT/PT Indicator= 'Full-time' or 'Part-time'.
- Graduated: The number of students in the cohort who graduated within six years (by the sixth summer term after entry) from the same university serves as the numerator for the graduation rate.

4. Procedural Note

After universities have approved the Retention file, the Board's IRM staff provide a subset of the data to the Board's Institutional Research (IR) staff for analysis. IR staff calculate the number of students in a cohort (which serves as the denominator) and the number of those same students who are retained or graduated by a specified year (which serves as the numerator). IR staff provide the results of the retention and graduation rate data analysis to each university data administrator for their review and approval *prior* to the data being approved by each university Board of Trustee and the Board of Governors as part of the Accountability Report process.